

**DELTA PROTECTION COMMISSION**

14215 RIVER ROAD  
P.O. BOX 530  
WALNUT GROVE, CA 95690  
Phone (916) 776-2290  
FAX (916) 776-2293  
E-Mail: dpc@citlink.net Home Page: www.delta.ca.gov



**Agenda Item #9**  
July 14, 2000

To: Delta Protection Commission

From: Margit Aramburu, Executive Director

Subject: **CALFED ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECT REVIEW:  
Staten Island, a.k.a. M&T Staten Ranch**

**BACKGROUND:**

**Project Proponent:** Nature Conservancy/Cosumnes Preserve

**PROJECT LOCATION:**

**Zone of the Delta:** Primary

**County:** San Joaquin

**Island/Tract:** Staten Island

**Reclamation District:** RD 38

**Acres:** 9,200 acres (one ownership; multiple parcels)

**Adjacent Waterways:** North and South Forks of Mokelumne River

**Ownership of Adjacent Lands:** Private Ownership North, South, East and West; Non-profit ownership to northeast (McCormack Williamson Tract, recently purchased by The Nature Conservancy).

**Land Uses on Adjacent Lands:** Agriculture

**HISTORY OF OWNERSHIP OF THE SITE:** Current owner of record is Pacific Realty Associates, LP

**DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE:**

**Topography:** The island is generally flat and slopes north to south.

**Elevation of Land Area:** The elevation at the north end is zero and the elevation at the south end is -15 feet

**Status of Levees:** All levees are non-project levees (built and maintained by RD 38). The levees meet or exceed Hazard Mitigation Plan (FEMA) standards. The exterior of the levees is riprapped. The top of the levees is passable in all weather situations.

**Elevation of Levees (In relationship with 100-year flood plain):** The island has sturdy levees that provide required flood protection for agricultural land uses.

**Groundwater Table Elevation:** Groundwater elevation is 3 to 4 feet below the surface.

**Soils:** Soils are designated Prime. Staten Island is Rindge-Kingile-Ryde soils. Soils are very well drained, organic, fine-textured, and mineral. All soils vary from deep to shallow.

**Water Sources:** Riparian water is available on all sides of the island through approximately 54 intakes.

**Drainage From or Through Site:** Surplus water drains to the south end of the island and is pumped out into the South Fork of the Mokelumne River.

**General Plan Designation:** Agriculture

**Zoning:** Zoning is 40-acre minimum parcel size.

**Williamson Act Contract:** Entire site is under Williamson Act contract.

## **USES OF THE SITE:**

**Agricultural Uses and Crops-Present and Potential, and How They Relate to Animal and Bird Use:** Current agricultural use is row crops, largely corn and other crops, including tomatoes. Staten Island is nationally recognized for practice of wildlife friendly agriculture including extensive seasonal flooding for migratory bird and waterfowl habitat.

**Current Value of Crops:** \$5,000,000

**Current Property Taxes, Fees, etc. Which Support Governmental and Special District Activities:** \$160,000 (Property taxes, includes fire, North Delta Water Agency, Mosquito Abatement, school taxes, etc)

**Length of Time in Agricultural Use:** Island has been in agricultural use since mid-1800s.

**Existing Utilities and Infrastructure:** Existing utilities include water, gas, electric and telephone to support ranch activities. County road (Walnut Grove Thornton Road crosses northern end of island, and Staten Island Road runs north-south about 1/3 of the way down the island.

**Existing Gas Wells and Support Facilities:** Gas wells on site; new Lodi Gas Pipeline to cross island.

**Existing Structures and Uses:** On island facilities include Ranch Headquarters, shop, ten houses, grain elevator, warehouses, and equipment sheds.

**Existing Recreational Uses (Including developed Commercial or Public Recreation Facilities and Informal Recreational Uses):** There are no public or private recreation facilities on Staten Island.

**Existing Wildlife Habitat Values (Including Vegetation on Both Sides of the Levees, and Within the Interior of the Island/Tract):** Several areas of riparian habitat have been enhanced along the exterior (riverside) of the eastern levee. Several Channel Islands at south end of island have been enhanced and protected. The Island provides critical wintering habitat for the Greater Sandhill Crane (state-listed as a threatened species) and Lesser Sandhill Crane, Tundra Swan, and Geese.

**Number of Current Residents:** Nine families.

**Number of Current Employees:** Ten permanent; 12 seasonal.

**HISTORY OF FLOODING:** Staten Island has flooded once, in 1907.

**PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT:** Purpose of project is to continue profitable, commercial agriculture, promote wildlife friendly practices, and participate in management of local flooding problems associated with Cosumnes and Mokelumne Rivers and watershed runoff. Project will secure protection for Sandhill Cranes.

**DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT, OR PROJECT ALTERNATIVES UNDER CONSIDERATION:**

**Breaches in Levees:** No breaching is proposed; only after completion of full environmental review, and if Staten Island is designated for use as a floodway, new weir could be installed to facilitate floodway associated activities.

**Impact of Breaching on Water Surface Elevation in Adjacent Channels (Affect on Water Diversions, Pumps, and/or Siphons):** There should be a reduction of on water surface elevation in adjacent channels.

**Interior Levee Modifications:** Only after completion of full environmental review, and if Staten Island is enhanced for use as a floodway, planting along the interior of the levee could protect the levee from erosion of flood waters.

**Excavation:** No excavation is proposed.

**Placement of Fill or Grading:** Only after completion of full environmental review, and if Staten Island is enhanced for use as a floodway, planting along the interior of the levee could protect the levee from erosion of flood waters.

**Planting:** Only after completion of full environmental review, and if Staten Island is enhanced for use as a floodway, planting along the interior of the levees would be installed to protect the levees from erosion of flood waters.

**Constructed Facilities and Infrastructure:** Only after completion of full environmental review, and if Staten Island is enhanced for use as a floodway, new weir and new pumps could be installed to facilitate floodway associated activities.

**Management:** Nature Conservancy intends to continue management of the entire island for agriculture and for seasonal wildlife habitat. Any modifications for floodwater management will be designed to minimize impact on seasonal agriculture or waterfowl habitat.

**Ownership:** Nature Conservancy could hold the property as part of the Cosumnes Preserve, or could transfer the property to a new, locally directed non-profit entity.

**Estimated Project Costs:** The current owner has set the value of all acreage, equipment, improvements, and structures at \$38 million dollars.

**Proposed Funding Sources:** Nature Conservancy has applied for funding from CALFED ecosystem restoration funds.

**Proposed Fees to be Paid in Lieu of Taxes and Assessments, If Any:** If land is held by a non-profit and farmed, as proposed, all taxes will continue to be paid.

**NEARBY PENDING AND PROPOSED PROJECTS:**

- In 1999, the Nature Conservancy purchased 1,612-acre McCormack Williamson Tract, with funds from CALFED. The final design and management plan for the site will be developed within the North Delta Planning process (environmental review to be initiated soon).
- The Department of Fish and Game is developing a plan for enhancement of habitat on portions of Canal Ranch, a 3,070 acre tract to the east of Staten Island. DFG has applied for CALFED funds to acquire easement or fee title to Canal Ranch in the future.
- CALFED is actively planning its North Delta Project that will include flood control and habitat enhancement in the area surrounding and including Staten Island.

**PERMITS/ACTIONS REQUIRED:** No permits are required for acquisition, nor for continued management of the island for agriculture and seasonal wildlife habitat. Permits would be required for installation of weirs and for changes to the levee.

**CONFORMANCE WITH PROPOSED CALFED ACTIONS:** The acquisition would be in conformance with proposed CALFED goals for the North Delta area.

**ISSUES:**

**Agriculture:**

**Cumulative Impacts to Prime Ag Lands in the Area?** The acquisition is the first proposed CALFED-funded acquisition of agricultural land in San Joaquin County. If agriculture is continued, there would be no impact to prime agricultural land.

**Consistent with Williamson Act (State and County Levels)?** If there is no change to agriculture, the acquisition would be consistent with Williamson Act.

**Impacts to Adjacent Agricultural Land Uses, such as:**

**Seepage?**

**Weeds/Unwanted, Possibly Protected Plants "Migrating" to Ag Lands?**

**Protected Species "migrating" to Ag Lands?**

**Restrictions to Common, Accepted Ag Practices?**

Acquisition and continued management as currently managed would have no impact to adjacent agricultural land uses.

**Buffer Areas Needed/Included Between Proposed Use and Existing Adjacent Uses?**

Since the entire island would be acquired, there would be no need for buffer areas.

**Would Development of New Aquatic Habitat Affect Nearby Water Diversions?**

Proposed habitat would be upland, managed wetland, or agricultural which would have no affect on nearby water diversions.

**Wildlife Habitat:**

**Will the Project Result in the Loss of Existing Habitat? What Type?** No

**Will the Project Protect and/or Enhance Existing Wetland Habitat (duck club, In-channel Island)?** Potentially yes.

**Is the Project Consistent with Regional Plans for Habitat Enhancement?** Yes, CALFED proposes to protect 40,000 to 75,000 acres of wildlife friendly agriculture in the Delta.

**Does the Project Take Advantage of Wildlife Habitat Benefits Associated with Agriculture (Mosaic Concept; Seasonal Flooding; etc.)?** Yes, would build on existing program of seasonal wildlife habitat management.

**Are there Benefits Associated with “Adding On” to Existing Habitat Areas, Such as Creation of a Corridor?** The acquisition and management of the island for seasonal wildlife habitat would create a corridor south from the Cosumnes Preserve and nearby McCormack Williamson Tract.

**Are There Adequate Provisions for Management of the Site?** Nature Conservancy and CALFED have adequate resources to develop a management strategy for Staten Island. Staten Island's farming operation is currently profitable and is expected to continue.

**Is Site Ownership an Easement Which Allows Land to Remain in Private Ownership?** Fee title ownership is proposed to be by a non-profit entity that would be similar to private ownership.

**Project on Publicly Owned Land, Within Designated Refuge, or Lands Subject to Flood Easement?** Not currently.

**Recreation:**

**Will Existing Recreation Activities be Displaced?** No, none on island.

**Does the Project Include New Recreational Development (New Trails, New Overlooks, New Small Boat Launch Facilities; New Fishing Facilities; New Picnic Facilities; New Interpretive Facilities)?** Unknown; Nature Conservancy would likely allow limited observation of migratory waterfowl during winter months.

**Would New Recreational Development Complement Surrounding Land Uses?** Since entire island is proposed for acquisition, new recreational development would have no impact on surrounding land uses.

**Other Issues:**

**Address Mosquito Control Component?** Proposed project would continue existing management. Any changes would need consultation with Vector Control District.

**Promote Subsidence Control?** Yes, expanded winter flooding would aid in subsidence control.

**Impacts to Levees, such as:**

**Increased Levee Erosion/Impacts?**

**Water Pressure on Levees?**

**Unauthorized Recreation Uses?**

**Increased Flood Pressures on Downstream Levees?**

**Impacts to Levee Inspections and/or Maintenance?**

Acquisition and continued agricultural land use would have no impact to levees. If Staten Island were to be used as a floodway in the future, there would be impacts to the interior of the levees and appropriate steps would need to be taken to protect the interior such as: additional fill, thick vegetation buffer, or riprap.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DELTA PROTECTION COMMISSION:**

The Land Use and Resource Management Plan for the Primary Zone of the Delta states:

Land Use Policy P-2: Local Government General Plans and zoning codes shall continue to strongly promote agriculture as the primary land use in the Primary Zone; recreation land uses shall be supported in appropriate locations and where the recreation uses do not conflict with agricultural land uses or other beneficial uses, such as waterside habitat.

Agriculture Policy Policy P-1: Commercial agriculture in the Delta shall be supported and encouraged as a key element in the State's economy and in providing the food supply needed to sustain the increasing population of the State, the Nation, and the world.

Agriculture Policy P-2: Local governments shall identify the unique qualities of the Delta which make it well suited for agriculture. These qualities include: rich soil, ample supplies of water, long growing seasons, mild climate, and proximity to packaging and shipping infrastructure. The unique physical characteristics of the Delta also require that agricultural land owners maintain extensive levee systems, provide flood control, and have adequate drainage to allow the lands to be farmed.

## MAP OF ZONES





